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International Order in the 21st Century: A Conference Report

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OVERVIEW

On May 16-17, 1997, McGill University Professors T.V. Paul (Political Science) and John Hall (Sociology) hosted an international conference entitled "International Order in the 21st Century." It was co-sponsored by the Universite de Montreal - McGill Research Group in International Security (REGIS), the Security and Defence Forum (SDF) and McGill University. Some 25 eminent academics from around the world, primarily from Canada and the United States, participated in the conference. Ferry de Kerckhove, of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT - CPB) also attended. The conference was divided into four parts. It began by outlining the issues which have the potential to pose challenges to international order in the 21st century. This section addressed the questions, what does international order mean and how is a system ordered? The second section was dedicated to predicting the activities and posture of a number of "contenders" in the coming century. Each of the countries which were discussed have significant ties to Canada (the U.S., Russia, the European Community, China and India). The third section of the conference was devoted to strategies for dealing with the challenges outlined in the previous panels. This section was divided into a theoretical and practical component. The theoretical component discussed the relevance of theory for studying international order and highlighted the divergent interpretations of the coming century theorists of differing persuasions hold. The second part of the strategies panel discussed the practical implications of the competing paradigms. The conference's final panel was devoted to the policy (foreign and defence) implications of the issues which arose throughout the conference for Canadian policy makers.

OBJECTIVE

The conference's objective was to provide a sounding board for academics and policy makers trying to construct a scenario for the international social, political, economic and security environment of the 21st century. The conference was a real success. It inspired candid and insightful discussion.[1] Although the conference was held in an academic setting and was geared towards furthering intellectual debate on the emerging international order, many of the topics which were discussed had considerable relevance to the efforts of Canadian policy makers attempting to devise a strategy for taking Canada into the 21st century as a peaceful and important player on the world stage. Perhaps the most important message of the conference was that the 21st century is going to herald a multiplicity of challenges for policy makers and scholars. What the conference confirmed is that the 21st century is not going to be a period of quiescence or predictability. Rather, the world is going to continue to be a phosphoric place and the strains on international order we are facing today will continue, and may even deepen. It noted however, that appropriate foreign policy strategies need to be developed. One overall conclusion was to make states more "intelligent" and "prudential" in their calculations and behaviour, both internally and externally.

Canada is an active player in world politics. She is often looked to by other states to

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[1] The conference participants were divided into two theoretical camps. For Liberals, international order can best be achieved/protected through trade ties, widespread education and other peaceful/democratic means. Liberals often concentrate more on international institutions and organizations than individual nation states as the primary actors and decision makers on the international stage. Norms, principles and the rule of law have the ability to bind state behaviour according to the Liberal paradigm. In the Realist view offense is the best defence. They view deterrence and balance of power (between nation states) as the best means of achieving or maintaining international order. Rogue states, particularly armed rogue states are of particular concern to Realists. Nation states are the focus of study for Realist scholars. They believe that states act as unitary, rational actors ie: states are guided by a desire to maximize their power in relation to other states.

play an advisory role because of the credibility Canada enjoys as a result of being a member of the "First World Clubs" without having a history of intervention or colonization. Maintaining Canada's enviable position in the international political economy in the upcoming century will not be a simple task for Canadian policy makers. The conference on "International Order in the 21st Century" spoke to the problems which Canada may face in attempting to do so. This paper provides an overview of the conference, highlighting the issues which were of most relevance for Canadian policy makers. For purposes of practicality, the paper matches the structure of the conference. (Attached please find a copy of the conference program.)

"THE ISSUES:" Obstacles to, and Harbingers of, International Order

The "Issues" panels outlined the participants predictions for the 21st century. The issues panels were the most relevant for policy makers as they provided an overview of the many issues which could threaten international order in the future. While each presenter based his/her predictions of the future in international relations theory, the issues which they discussed were tangible. The panelists had divergent views on the future of the international economy and security environment, yet they all agreed that international order was not in great peril in the upcoming century. The first issues panel addressed the questions of the future of the international political economy, and the future of peace and stability in the Third World.

For Robert Brenner (University of California, Los Angeles), the international order is a set of economic relations shaped by capitalism. He did not predict the demise of capitalism, but he did warn the conference of the possibility of an ongoing international economic downturn.[2]

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[2] For Brenner, the key to predicting the future of the international economy is the profitability rate. Profits allow one to calculate how much capital is available for investment, and to measure the health of a given sector. The current economic downturn, he argued, is due to a fall in the profitability rate, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

The greatest threat to the international economy, argued Brenner, is the vulnerability of capital in the modern era. Theoretically, older firms are expected to withdraw from competition when they can no longer compete with newer, low-cost firms. In reality however, their sunk costs and knowledge, do not allow for a smooth exit option. Instead, older firms try to compete with the newer firms, leading to a price war, and potential sector-wide economic downturn.

The implications of a sectoral economic downturn do not only pose problems for the firms engaged in the given sector, but also for the state. Decreased profits often lead to decreased wages and higher unemployment rates. Decreased profitability, argued Brenner, poses two main problems for nation states. Firstly, economic downturn impoverishes a nation thereby putting considerable strain on governments to provide social assistance (while simultaneously) its tax base is shrinking). Secondly, the power and role of labour becomes an important issue. For some countries one solution to the problems posed by economic downturn is emigration. For others, emigration poses a new set of problems. Canada has always been an attractive emigration destination. It must, therefore, consider what steps it would take to confront a growing number of workers in a shrinking labour market. Canada must also consider the repercussions of large influxes of labourers from abroad. This is particularly true as Canada enters into free trade agreements such as the existing North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas by 2005. Governments play a large role in determining the economic of any nation. As noted Michael Smith (McGill) in his commentary on Brenner, government error has led to serious economic crises in the past. As an example Smith cited the economic crisis which followed the overvaluation of the U.S. dollar in the 1970s.

John Hall, (McGill University) attacked the effects of globalization from a different angle. Hall was more concerned with the impact of globalization on the power of nation states

(governments). For Hall, globalization, which he defined as international pressures which overpower nation states and render states victims to the pressures of the international economy, is a merely a fad. Trade was one of the factors Hall used to illustrate that globalization has not impeded the power of national governments. He maintained that the international economy is an inter-state one geared primarily toward North-North trade. The Third World, he argued, is a virtual non-actor in the international economy. Despite the fact that globalization demands greater efficiency, Hall did not predict an increase in labour unrest or labour-government tensions. Rather, expects labour to continue becoming more quiescent in the face of decreasing wages and employment opportunities. A number of the participants questioned Hall's minimization of the impact of globalization.

Kal Holsti (University of British Columbia) discussed the potential of armed conflict in the Third World. Holsti argued that it is time we "re-think the Third World." The prediction that the post-Cold War geopolitical environment would be one of chaos has not come true. Instead, two crises have come to plague the Third World: one of the state, the other of governance. Both crises can be attributed, according to Holsti, to the inefficacy of the state apparatus. The notion of the sovereign state as a protective device, i.e.: the body entrusted with providing security for its citizens, is at the root of the aforementioned problems. Rather than providing security, the state in the Third World is often the greatest perpetrator of violence. Politics within states, not inter-state war, pose the greatest threat to international order, he argued. The greatest threats to the Third World in the coming century are internal, he concluded. Holsti does not expect them to pose major threats to international order. Most of the Third World abides by the rules outlined in the Treaty of Westphalia, said Holsti. They are also among the greatest promoters of international peace and stability at the United Nations and other

international organizations. He reminded the audience that although the internal problems facing many Third World countries are great, the success stories must not be forgotten. Nonetheless, the aforementioned crises do point to real problems. In particular, they may lead to a phenomenon Holsti refers to as "the new medievalism."

"The new medievalism" refers to the process by which the state as a public realm collapses and is captured by private groups. It refers to the de-institutionalization of state institutions. A prime example is the de-institutionalization of the military and its subsequent control by rival gangs. Such situations are rampant in Africa today and could pose significant challenges for a country such as Canada which is renowned for its efficacy in international peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention operations. Holsti did not elaborate on any potential roles for the international community in combating the new medievalism, however, his arguments do appear to support Canada's policy of promoting Canadian values such as democracy and the rule of law around the world. Holsti's presentation also appears to confirm Canada's efforts to promote institution building and civil society around the world.

The second "Issues" panel broached the issues of transnational religion and the secular - fundamentalist divide (Peter Van der Veer, University of Amsterdam), demography, development and domestic conflict (Jack Goldstone, University of California, Davis) and the diffusion of weapons of mass destruction (T.V. Paul, McGill). This panel suggested a means for ameliorating religious conflict, highlighted the primacy of international institutions as shapers of state behaviour in the current period, and predicted their continued (if not deepened) importance in the coming century.

According to Van der Veer, international order is organized in three ways: civilization, fundamentalism and secularism. Fundamentalism, according to this perspective, is one of the

greatest threats to international order. Secularism, on the other hand, is seen as a panacea. For Van der Veer, such a perspective indicates a deification of civilization, and a circumscription of its definition. Essentially, civilization becomes specific to a set of societies at a particular time. Van der Veer challenged this view and argued that civilization is a broad, processoral concept. Transnational migration and the civil tensions which have arisen in secular states pose obvious foils to the civilization argument, he claimed.

The key to achieving order, according to Van der Veer, is to re-define public religions and transcend the accepted norm of "good" versus "bad" public religion. Van der Veer urged the audience to seek out the democratic traditions in "bad public religions"(fundamentalism) and surmount the notion that fundamentalism is innately anti-Western and anti-secular. Fundamentalism, he argued, is often a reaction to the aggressively interventionist practices of secular governments in many countries. A lack of understanding of the societies where fundamentalism has taken root has led to foreign governments supporting groups on the sole basis of their secular credentials. Such blind policy is not justified, he argued. The effect of the West supporting interventionist secular governments often results in anti-Western fundamentalist movements, he explained. The obvious implication of Van der Veer's presentation for policy makers in the West is to try to reach a better understanding of the socio-cultural reality of countries with fundamentalist states or movements. His conclusions would also appear to suggest that Western powers, should they wish to make a difference in countries where fundamentalism is a powerful force, should focus their attention both on the state level and at the societal level. Through DFAIT and the Canadian International development Agency, Canada engages civil society groups around the world in joint ventures and attempts to further democratization. Van der Veer's presentation confirms the importance of such activities.

Jack Goldstone spoke about the impact of demography in the next century and the need to ensure that population growth does not exceed economic growth in the future. Economic growth in and of itself is not enough, said Goldstone. What counts are the distributional issues which are not accounted for in macro-measures such as GDP. It is essential for international order that states have the economic basis to provide for their citizenry, he argued. This includes the provision of patronage in order to appease elite groups, argued Goldstone. Elites pose the greatest threat to international order in Goldstone's analysis. In order to build trust amongst competing social groups, we need to understand the bases for elite cooperation and discord. International order will prevail where elite desires for power are merged with state capacity.

His overall message was two-fold. Firstly, that peace-making must begin at the elite level and secondly, that the state must be strong enough to ensure successful conflict resolution. Although Goldstone presented a cogent argument, he did not outline a potential role for external actors in peace-making efforts. Nonetheless, Goldstone's analysis does point to an important role for Canada in peacemaking in the 21st century. As a nation which is considered friendly by most countries, Canada could be called on to host elite dialogue in strife-ridden countries.

The final presenter in the "Issues" panels was T.V. Paul (McGill) who asked whether weapons of mass destruction are agents of chaos or forces for equalization. According to Paul, the context determines which role those weapons will play. Status-quo oriented small and middle powers have historically supported disarmament efforts because they can exert more power in a peaceful international environment. However, as long as the threat of great power intervention remains, small and medium powers will devise ways to prevent such interventions. Paul pointed to the United State's vocal call for nuclear non-proliferation as evidence of his claim. According to Paul, the U.S. is actively promoting the reduction of nuclear weapons because it is

the world leader in info-tech weaponry and would be best served in a nuclear weapons-free world. Subsequently, Paul expects the U.S. to continue to promote global disarmament in the 21st century. Paul added that chemical and biological weapons are likely to cause more problems for the 21st century international order.

"THE CONTENDERS"

The contenders panels were guided by two main questions: if they are not already major powers, will they become so in the 21st century?, and will they be guided by a desire to maintain the status quo (in terms of international power relations) or will they challenge the existing order? The panel's consensus was that it is unlikely the existing international power structure will be significantly challenged in the 21st century. According to John Ikenberry (University of Pennsylvania), the United States will remain the international hegemon because it has effectively bound the international community to a specific international order. The U.S. based order is one of rule bound institutions or "institutional co-binding." The system is so pervasive, he argued, that it would be too costly for any state to try to withdraw from it. Because the U.S. is a large democracy which is open to trade and investment, reasoned Ikenberry, other states are willing to abide by the rules of the U.S. hegemonic order.

None of the other panelists believed that the country which they had been asked to discuss was likely to challenge the international order in the 21st century. Jack Snyder (Columbia University) dismissed the possibility of Russia challenging the international order for two reasons. Firstly, there is no strong external threat to Russia today. Secondly, Russia has a weak tradition of nationalism and any nationalist ambitions have been discredited by the demise of the Soviet Union. He does not predict this will change in the near future.

Neither China or Japan are expected to try to increase their international leverage in the

21st century through coercive means according to the panelists. Both powers will continue to play important roles in Asia, but they are not, over time, expected to attempt to transcend their regional power status. According to P.J. Pempel (University of Washington), Japan has not attempted to take a leadership role in Asia beyond an economic one. As inter-regional trade and investment which does not go through Japan increases, Japan's role in the region, or the international community is not likely to increase either, concluded Pempel. Jack Goldstone commented that in order to protect its access to raw materials, Japan will have to interact more constructively with the rest of the international community despite the polity's isolationist tendencies.

China is not expected to play an increasing role in international politics in the 21st century in a significant way either. Steven Chan (University of Colorado) argued that despite its incredible economic growth rate, China will most likely remain a regional power in the coming century. It is unclear, he said, what China's foreign policy orientation is, but external pressures will determine what course China will take. China does not claim to be a revisionist state, nor does it have much capacity to project military force abroad, argued Chan. It does however, see the United States as such and points to the Helms-Burton Bill as evidence. Chan further argued that the likelihood of democratization in China is slim. Despite the increased mobilization of Chinese civil society, China's political leaders have not liberalized the Chinese system in a significant way. Chan warned that the Chinese leadership will not allow for reforms which threaten their hold on power.

Goldstone commented that China may not pose a security threat to the West, but it merits continued observation because it is a power in a region which is of key importance to the United States. In particular, Goldstone wonders if China will enter Asia as a cooperative player or as a

potential aggressive regional power. Until the current political transition in China is completed, argued Goldstone, it is difficult to ascertain answers to these questions. For now, issue-focussed engagement is the best policy option for engagement with China, concluded Goldstone.

India was the final "contender" discussed at the conference. According to Baldev Raj Nayar (McGill University), India's search for an international role can only be described as ambiguous. Despite the U.S. and Chinese policies of containment towards India, since the 1960s, India has not allowed itself to be relegated to middle power status. It has even acquired sophisticated military capacity to secure its international posture despite an entrenched tradition of passivism. India has successfully become more than a limited power, said Nayar. Containment and satellization have proven themselves ineffective. Accommodation, argued Nayar, is the best approach for foreign governments to take in their relations with India. Ferry de Kerckhove, agreed with Nayar's conclusions and pointed out that Canada is engaging India in bilateral and multilateral fora.

"STRATEGIES"

The strategies sessions underscored the institutional nature of international order. This move toward institutionalization argued Lisa Martin (Harvard University) is not an accidental. States accept institutions because institutions allow states to resolve disputes in an orderly manner. Institutions also decrease vulnerability to other states because they have explicit norms which limit state behaviour. Institutions locks in a particular pattern of order and a pattern of benefit distribution for its members. An understanding of this variance and why states concede to such patterns would shed considerable insight on the underpinnings of international order, argued Martin. In his commentary on Martin's paper, John Ikenberry urged Martin to tease out the reasons why institutionalism has taken root in the modern era. He suggested democracy as

the determining variable in the institutional equation.

There was an optimistic conclusion from the strategies panel. As states become more beholden to institutions, the likelihood of military warfare as a means of conflict resolution will diminish. Economic sanctions are likely to be the punitive measures of the 21st century, argued Mark Brawley (McGill). As states become more interconnected (globalization), economic sanctions will become increasingly effective, he concluded. Brawley does not predict an increase in the use of sanctions however. Instead he predicts fewer, more effective, sanctions will be used in the coming century.

Andrew Knight (Bishops University) presented a paper on multilateralism which he had co-authored with Michel Fortmann (University of Montreal). In their paper, Knight and Fortmann, discussed the changing nature of the international system, and the crisis in multilateralism in particular. As evidence, they point to the ongoing crisis at the United Nations. The world, according to Knight and Fortmann, is moving from international to world order. Today, international matters, they argue, are indistinguishable from regional ones. Technology has made the world a smaller, more immediate place. It has also made global citizenship, at the technological level at least, a reality. These "distance proximities," argued Knight, could pose real challenges for the sovereignty of the nation state.

The panel highlighted the importance of state capacity and binding rules for international order. Should the panel be correct and international institutions become the primary actors on the international stage in the coming century, to whom should states be accountable and whose purposes will they serve? Sovereignty has always been a primary objective of nation states. It is unlikely they will entirely forego sovereignty in exchange for the security (economic and military) that institutions offer. As a strong promoter of multilateralism, Canadian foreign policy

makers may find themselves debating these issues well into the next century.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The main message of the policy panel was that policy making will become an increasingly difficult task in the 21st century. For Canada, a multicultural, trade-oriented nation, this is especially true. As globalization brings the world closer together, and international order is increasingly based on international institutions, Canada is well placed to thrive. Canada is a recognized multilateral player and a strong promoter of international institutions. Nevertheless, Canada must find ways to attract foreign investment and economic opportunities if it is to remain an effective player in the international political arena. Canada may want to develop a clear articulation of the challenges it will face in the 21st century, and its alternatives. By laying its cards on the table, Canada will be able to define its goals for the 21st century and devise a strategy for achieving those goals.

Speaking "off-the-record," Ferry de Kerckhove (DFAIT - CPB), shed some insight on the impact of globalization (which incorporates all of the issues discussed at the conference) on Canada. How globalization will affect the relative power of nation states in the 21st century, argued de Kerckhove, is Canada's primary concern. In particular, Canada faces the very real challenge that her international influence may wane in light of the emergence of new powers. Nonetheless, he said, globalization could also be very beneficial for Canada. As evidence of such opportunities, de Kerckhove cited the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He cautioned being too optimistic about such trade ventures, and suggested the need to consider why Canada entered into the NAFTA since Canadian Direct Investment has decreased and Canada is experiencing a productivity lag. There is an international scramble for Foreign Direct Investment, argued de Kerckhove. International competitiveness has new connotations, he

argued, particularly in the areas of information technology. "A robust economy is not enough," he added, there is a real "need to increase productivity." If Canada is going to successfully reduce its debt, it must also significantly increase its productivity levels.

Trade ventures such as the NAFTA, argued de Kerckhove, also point to the need to consider the environmental and demographic challenges the next century will bring. Canada may be able to use immigration as a means of offsetting the reality of an aging population, but what are the ramifications of such policies in the future?, he asked. For Canada, questions of immigration are further compounded by the French-English debate, de Kerckhove reminded the audience.

De Kerckhove fears that conflicts will be increasingly protracted in the future due to the "re-discovery" of ethnic conflict and Canada's inability to deal with it. He also sees a continued role for government in the future. "We still need government in Canada," because: Canada needs to increase its economic growth rate, particularly, its productivity rate, if its population is to continue to enjoy a comfortable quality of life. And, government is necessary to promote human development, particularly that of youth, in the 21st century to safeguard social cohesion in North America. De Kerckhove took the time to respond to each presenter, and update him/her on Canada's position concerning the issue they had discussed.

CONCLUSION

The conference raised a number of question which Canadian policy makers may want to bear in mind as they plan Canada's future. Jack Snyder best articulated some of these questions when he asked: what will the norms of future order be?, and what are the normative ordering principles of the international system? The answers to these questions may provide a basis for Canadian policy makers as they confront the many challenges the conference predicted they will

face as we enter the next century.

Kal Holsti had some more direct advice for policy makers. He warned that the conference may have been overly optimistic in predicting that little is likely to change in the 21st century and that most powers are relatively content with the existing order. Ironically, said Holsti, order was entirely overlooked as a discussion topic throughout the conference. He urged policy makers to consider questions of justice and equity, as they forge policy directives for the 21st century. The balance-of-power, argued Holsti, is an anachronism and has no role in the contemporary period. The role of ideas in international relations should not be underscored. The great crises of the 20th century, he reminded the conference, were not based in material conditions but ideational ones.

Steve Smith added to Holsti's comments. Smith argued that international order is something which is constructed by particular actors, in order to fulfil particular objectives. Smith suggests that the best way to approach the question of international order is to first ask: why we want an international order?, what the costs of international order are?, and how free are we to question, or change, that order?